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A CAUTION against ILL COMPANY:

OR, A

DISCOURSE

SHEWING THE

DANGER

OF

CONVERSING FAMILIARLY

WITH

BAD MEN.

By JAMES ELLESBY,
Minister of CHISWICK.

*Fuge, ceu pestem, malum consortium
Et malum consilium.—*

THE FIFTH EDITION.

L O N D O N:

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CAUTION AGAINST THE COMPANY

O. R. A.

DISCOURSE

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TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE
C H A R L E S,
Earl of BURLINGTON, &c.

THE following Discourse is humbly
dedicated by the Author; who be-
seeches Almighty GOD to bless his
Lordship with Health and long Life,
with a liberal and generous Education,
with a virtuous and religious Disposi-
tion, with all accomplished Endowments,
both natural and moral, which may ren-
der him the Joy and Support of his
Family, an Honour and Ornament to
his Country, a singular Example of
Prudence and Piety in his Conduct, and
an happy Instrument of doing much Good.

The DEDICATION,

in his Generation, and becoming serviceable both to Church and State, in that eminent Station wherein GOD has placed him. And lastly, 'tis prayed, that as his Lordship advances in Age and Experience, he may happily avoid all those Rocks and Shelves, ill Customs and bad Examples I mean, on which so many hopeful Young Gentlemen have made Shipwreck both of their Honour and Estates.

THIS, My Lord, is the hearty Prayer and Wish of Him, who is very ambitious of doing

YOUR LORDSHIP

The best Service he is capable of.



*A Caution against ILL COMPANY:
Or, A Discourse shewing the great
Danger of conversing familiarly
with BAD MEN.*

WHEN we consider the general Corruption of the Age, and the great Reputation which Vice hath got in a Nation professing a Religion that most strictly forbids and severely threatens it, under the highest and greatest Penalties that can possibly be conceived; we cannot but stand amazed thereat, and be ready to cast about in our Thoughts what should be the Occasion of so foul an Apostasy, as

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that

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that which the Christian World doth at present lie under.

AND here, we need not go far to seek for a Reason of it, if we consider how little this Religion is believed by many that make an outward Profession of it, and wear the Livery of CHRIST's Disciples; yet in truth are no better than downright Pagans and Infidels, under a Christian Name; and who do it more Mischief upon that Account, than all its most open and avowed Adversaries among the Heathen.

FOR they think it not enough to disbelieve Christianity, and call in Question the Truth thereof, unless they likewise decry and run it down, exposing its Credit by their profane Jest and atheistical Scoffs, which have more in them of Rudeness and ill Manners, than of Wit or good Breeding. Neither are they content to keep their Opinions to themselves, but, like malicious People infected with the Plague, they make it their Business to scatter the Venom and Contagion thereof wherever they come, and among all People they converse
with

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with. And no wonder then, if the Lives and Practices of such Persons be as loose as their Principles, and they become alike dangerous and debauched in both.

THIS is a Distemper which hath more or less infected all Sorts and Degrees of Men amongst us, especially young Gentlemen, and Persons of the chiefest Quality; who, as soon as they are got loose from Government, and peep abroad into the World, are presently caught up by the Libertines of the Age, the great Corrupters of Faith and Manners, who stand ready to seize and make a Prey of them; or else they find them out of their own accord, to make an unfortunate Acquaintance withal, and list themselves into their Club and Society; where they are no sooner entered, but they become lost in a manner to all that is good, hopeful, and virtuous, and are in the High-way to Ruin and Destruction. For when once they are engaged among this sort of Men, and have been tainted by them; it is a Miracle if ever they escape their Hands, or recover themselves out of the Snares

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and Temptations which they have laid for them; it is very rare that we hear of any that do so.

THEREFORE, I think it a very charitable Office, as well as incumbent Duty, to warn all People, young ones especially, of the Company of such Persons, and lay open the Danger and Infection of such Mens Principles and Practices, to the End they may avoid them betimes, and not be drawn away by their ill Counsels, or pernicious Examples, which are the two main Things that corrupt the Minds and Manners of Men, and prejudice them against all that is good and virtuous. To which Purpose, I shall take Notice,

I. FIRST, Of the general Wickedness of the World, and the Multitudes of bad Examples that are therein.

II. SECONDLY, Endeavour to arm and fortify you against the Danger and Infection thereof, whenever you shall have Occasion to come among them, and cannot handsomely avoid them.

I. FIRST,

I. FIRST, I shall take Notice of the general Wickedness that is in the World, and the Multitudes of bad Examples which do every where abound.

THIS no Man that knows any thing of the World can be ignorant of; neither is it any new Remark or Observation; for the Depravity and Corruption of human Nature hath been the general Complaint of almost all Ages. The wise Men among the Heathens were very sensible thereof, and variously disputed the Causes of it. The Apostle, likewise, took Notice of it in his Days, when he said, "The whole world lies in wickedness," 1 *John* v. 19. And if it did so then, we have as much Reason for the like Complaint now, "on whom the ends of the world are come;" which are therefore called "perilous times," because Iniquity shall then abound, according to our Saviour's Prediction, *Matt.* xxiv. 12.

FOR those Vices and Immoralities, which heretofore fled into the Dark, and withdrew themselves into the most

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O bscure and retired Privacies, as ashamed of the Light, and unwilling to be exposed, have made bare their Face, discovered an impudent Forehead, and walk daily in publick without Disguise. Many Christians live so open and unconcerned in some of the foulest Sins and grossest Enormities, as if Iniquity was established by a Law, and God had given them not only Permission, but a Command to vie with the Brutes in Sensuality, and to become as wicked and sinful as Sin itself can make them.

THIS Age affords abundance of Persons metamorphosed into Beasts without a Fable, who have cast off all that is modest and man-like, and aspire after such high Degrees and Measures of Guilt, as, one would think, the Reason of Man, but especially the Profession of Christians, were not capable of. Nature, now-a-days, is debauched by Art; and Men have learnt to improve themselves into a more refined and artificial Sort of Guilt, than former Ages and more innocent Times have been acquainted with.

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IN general, so bad is the World, that truly serious and conscientious Persons, should they stand alone, would make but a small and indifferent Figure, while Vice and Wickedness, Lewdness and Debauchery, do every where swarm with their vast Numbers and increasing Multitudes.

To trace the Sons of *Belial* throughout all their Turnings and Windings, crooked and oblique Paths, would be an endless Thing, and scarce practicable, considering not only the Vastness of their Guilt, but the great Variety and Contradiction of their Humours. Some Men are invidiously wicked, more so out of Spite and Opposition to Virtue, than out of any great Love they bear to Vice; they are afraid of being thought too good amidst this general Apostasy and Declension of the Age, and for that Reason take a Pride in being thought worse than they are: But by this Means, being Hypocrites in Vice, they make themselves much greater Criminals in Religion likewise. Others again are such professed Patrons of Impiety, that they

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they endeavour what they can to spread and promote it in the World, and give it all the Assistance and Encouragement they are able; as if they intended to make Vice as lasting and durable as human Nature, by propagating Instances of Guilt and Folly to all succeeding Ages and Generations.

Now how can we expect that Virtue and Goodness should be able to thrive and prosper, when it meets every where with such Multitudes of Enemies and Opposers; and finds so very few Friends to take its Part, or give it Countenance? To consider what Interest and Reputation Vice hath got in the World, and what Contempt and Reproach a fixed and steady Virtue is pursued withal on all Hands, and among all Parties, when it makes against their Interest, would almost tempt a serious Man to renounce the World, and retire into Shades and Solitude, where there is less of Company, but more of Innocence. And indeed, this very Consideration, among others, gave the first Occasion to an Anchorite's reclus sort of Life; many pious and devout Persons retreating into Deserts
and

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and Wilderesses, on purpose to fly the Temptations of greater Towns and populous Cities: They chose rather to converse with Beasts of God's own immediate making, than with such as made themselves so; they being the more monstrous and dangerous of the two.

BUT there is no Necessity for any to do this; for should all good Men follow this Example, the World would be left to itself, to foam and rage in its own Wickedness, without any Hopes of becoming better. Moreover, our Saviour hath given us no Command or Encouragement for any Thing of this Nature: For though in his Time the World was over-run with all manner of Wickedness, both *Jewish* and *Pagan*, yet He did not turn Hermit, or retire absolutely from the Society and Conversation of Men, *Matt. xi. 18, 19.* For that would have overthrown the great End of his coming into the World, which was to better and reform it, as well by his Example as Doctrine; and therefore he convers'd freely and publickly with all Sorts, like a Physician among his Patients, refusing none his Company, who
came

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came with a Desire to learn, or upon whom he thought he might make a Cure.

AND herein the Example of Christ ought to be Matter of our Imitation; not to betake ourselves to Deserts and Solitude, where we shall meet with but few Opportunities of doing Good; but we should publickly endeavour (we of the Clergy more especially) by our sound Doctrine and pious Examples, to promote Religion in the World, and to stem, if possible, that Tide of Wickedness which sets with so strong and impetuous a Current, and is in danger to carry away weak and unwary People with the Force and Violence of its Stream.

BEFORE I proceed to the Caution and Advice I promised you in this Case, give me Leave to acquaint you, in the Second Place, in what Sense we may, and may not, engage in the Company of bad Men.

FOR the better understanding of this, we must consider, that there is a great deal

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deal of Difference between being in the Company of bad Men, and the keeping of them Company: The former we can never wholly avoid by all our Care and Industry; for then, as the Apostle saith, "we must needs go out of the world," 1 Cor. v. 10. for as long as the World stands, there will be bad Men of all Sorts; and while we live together in the World, we cannot always avoid them, be we never so careful or desirous of it: For,

1. *First*, It is impossible but that at some Time or other we shall fall into their Company unawares, and against our Wills, when we design nothing of it: For where there are good and bad Men mingled together, it is not to be imagined, but that we shall sometimes light upon the Bad as well as the Good; nay, the former is the more likely of the two, because the Wicked, in all Ages, have exceeded the Good, and got the Advantage of Numbers on their Side.

2. *Secondly*,

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2. *Secondly*, OUR very Callings and Employments in the World do many times cast us among all sorts of Men, and oblige us to hold a civil and decent Conversation with them; and this cannot be avoided as long as Men keep up Trade and Commerce in the World, which engageth them in great Variety of Business and Company.

3. *Thirdly*, IT is possible we may have Friends and Relations of our own, near Neighbours and Acquaintance, that may be none of the most regular in their Morals, or sober in their Conversation. Now in this Case, it would be very hard to think we are obliged either to a perpetual Shyness or total Forbearance of their Company; this would look something unnatural, and carry too great a Shew of Moroseness and Ill-Nature along with it.

4. *Fourthly*, A good Man may receive many Kindnesses and good Offices from bad Men; and in that Case too, Gratitude and Civility do oblige him to repay one Kindness with another; to
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acknowledge every Man's Civility, and repay it when Opportunity serves. Now this cannot be done, without some sort of Correspondence between them in the World.

5. *Fifthly*, We may sometimes go into the Company of bad Men, or admit them into ours, out of a Design of doing, if possible, some Good upon them; we may converse with them, as a Physician converses with sick and diseased Persons; or as Christ did with the *Scribes and Pharisees*, with *Publicans* and *Sinners*; not out of any Fondness or Delight we take in their Company; but in hopes of reclaiming or working upon them by good Counsel and Advice, if "peradventure God will give them" repentance to the acknowledging of "the truth," 2 *Tim.* ii. 25.

THIS indeed is a blessed Design, but which every good Man, that means well, is not capable of; he must be a well-resolved, prudent, and experienced Christian, that is fit to undertake a Design of this Nature, and carries so much of Danger and Hazard along with it;

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it; he ought to fortify himself beforehand with the strongest Antidotes, for fear he should catch the Infection himself, while he charitably attempts the Cure of it in others. But, however, the Thing in itself considered, carries a great deal of Goodness and Piety in it; and if undertaken by Persons capable thereof, may, by the Blessing of God, and Prudence in the Management, be made use of to very good Ends and Purposes, as sometimes it hath been done.

So that in some or all of the fore-mentioned Respects, it is a Thing next to impossible wholly to avoid the Company of bad Men, upon one Account or another.

BUT now, as I said before, it is one Thing to be in the Company of bad Men or wicked Persons, and another Thing to keep them Company as our intimate and familiar Acquaintance, or strike up a League and Friendship with them. The former may be accidental, and against our Wills; but this latter must be Matter of Deliberation and Choice, and cannot be done without our

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own voluntary Consent. It is one Thing to deal with them by Way of Trade or Commerce; to repair to them on the Account of Business; to visit them as a Relation, or to be civil to them as a Friend and Neighbour; but another Thing to take them into our Bosom, or choose them for our constant Companions and daily Associates; which a Man can never do without running a mighty Hazard of his Virtue and Innocency; and such as no truly wise or good Man would put to the Venture; and therefore I shall now proceed in the

II. SECOND Place, to caution you against the Company and Conversation of bad Men, and fortify you against the Malignity and Contagion thereof; especially such as are publicly vicious, openly scandalous and profane. Now this may be done these two Ways:

First, By coming among them as seldom as may be.

Secondly,

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Secondly, By watching and resolving beforehand against the Danger and Infection, when you cannot always avoid their Company.

1st, To prevent the Danger that may arise from bad Men, the best Way is, if we can do it handsomely, to avoid their Company, and come among them as little as may be : For Absence, generally, is the best Antidote against Infection ; and it is both safe and prudent to withdraw from a Temptation, when there is little Hopes of avoiding it any other Way : In such a Case, it is better to make an honourable Retreat, than to hazard our Virtue by a weak and feeble Defence. Here then the Advice of the wise Man comes in, and is most proper and seasonable, *Prov. iv. 14.*
" Enter not into the paths of the wicked,
" go not into the way of evil men, avoid
" it ; pass not by it, turn from it, and
" pass away."

Now this Advice will not be thought over strict and severe, if you consider with me the great Mischief and Inconveniency which commonly ariseth from

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too great a Freedom and Familiarity with bad Men or Women; for,

First, THERE is no Hopes of any Good to be got among them. This is true upon many Accounts, but more especially with respect to Religion, which is greatly injured and obstructed thereby. There is no greater Hindrance to the regular Practice of Religion and Piety, than the Conversation of such Men as are prejudiced against it. It is scarce possible for a Man to be good long, or good to any Purpose, who engageth himself too frequently and familiarly among the vain and looser Sort of People. For Example is very prevalent, and carries a mighty Stroke and Influence along with it, either to excite to Virtue, or tempt to Vice; but Vice, in many Respects, hath the Advantage over Virtue, in that it hath our corrupt Natures and evil Inclinations to back and befriend it.

COMPANY is a Mold that is apt to fashion the Manners of those that are cast into it: An intimate Conversation with bad Men is likely to stamp our Minds

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Minds with ill Impressions, and form our Natures to bad Customs and vicious Habits, which are quickly learnt, but not so easily forgot or worn out again.

THEREFORE it concerns all Persons, but young People more especially, to be very shy and cautious of their Company; to have a mighty Care what Friendships and Acquaintance they contract at their first setting out into the World, and what Persons they become intimate and familiar withal; because this is a Matter of very great Importance as to the future Conduct of their Lives; yea, many Times their Well-doing in both Worlds, doth in a great Measure depend upon the Prudence of their Choice herein in this Respect. They should then choose their Acquaintance by the Advantages they hope to receive from them in point of Wisdom and Knowledge, Virtue and Goodness; and not merely to gratify a vain, light, and frothy Humour; which yet is the chief Thing in Conversation that takes most with the present Age. A Humour very inconsistent with the Gravity and Seriousness of Christian Principles, unsuit-

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able to that pious and devout Frame of Mind, which ariseth from an awful Sense of God and Religion, and which ought to be continually upon our Minds; and is made by the wise Man the first Beginning or Step to Wisdom and Knowledge: *Prov. ix. 10.* "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy, is understanding." *Job xxviii. 28.* "And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, is understanding."

THE End therefore of Conversation, is not so much to sport and pass away our Time in a vain, foolish, and unprofitable Manner, as to redeem it for the improving ourselves and others in true Wisdom and solid Virtue, for the growing wiser and better every Day than other. The Company, therefore, of such Men is most to be valued and sought after, which conduceth more immediately to this great and excellent End: And tho' it be true, that Mirth and Chearfulness are sometimes necessary, and convenient to relax and divert our Minds, even as Sauce is to relish our Meat,

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Meat and keep up our Appetite; yet innocent Mirth is infinitely preferable to that which is light and frothy, lewd and profane; and the Pleasure received in the Society of wise and good Men, is, of all others, the most satisfactory and delightful to a virtuous and well-disposed Mind, and is such as leaves no Remorse or Sting of Guilt behind it.

THAT which is commonly called *Good Company*, in the Language of good Fellows, Experience tells us, is none of the best: For they teach us not to improve, but to lavish away and mispend our Time, and with it, very often, our Health, Estate, and Reputation to boot; so that not only single Persons, but sometimes whole Families, suffer thereby, and rue the miserable Effects of such Mens Conversation. For, alas! what is there to be got or learnt among them, but a great deal of Ill, that must be unlearnt again, and deeply repented of, if ever we would grow good, and set up to be serious?

CAN it be any Pleasure to a good Man, to hear Men run down Virtue and

and Religion, at that Rate, as many do? To hear them talk irreverently of their Maker, and contemptuously of all such as endeavour to be like Him. What Satisfaction can it be to a sober Person, to hear Men fly out into the lavish Commendations of a sensual and debauched Life, or to become the avowed Advocates of Sin and Vice? What Delight is it to have our Ears grated with formidable Oaths and Curles upon every little Emotion of Passion, and sometimes upon none at all; or to behold them quarrelling with those that will not bear them Company in all their Heights and Excesses of Intemperance?

He that can think this to be Pleasure, or good Company, may as well call Darkneſs Light, and Light Darkneſs, as the Prophet ſpeaks, *Iſaiab* v. 20. that is, give the Name of one Contrary to another; and with ſuch ſort of good Company Hell itſelf is like to be thronged and crouded, and can afford him enough thereof, if no other can pleaſe him.

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Secondly,

good
virtue
and

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Secondly, Instead of receiving any Good by ill Company we are in Danger to receive a great deal of Harm, and be set a great Way back in a virtuous and religious Course of Life. For suppose a Man should resolve never so seriously to take up and amend the former Wick- edness of his Life, or to live more strictly and cautiously for the future; yet if he doth not refrain from ill Company, and take up a Resolution against them, he can never hope to be Good long, nor avoid those Snares which will be laid for him: Nay, let him be never so constant to the religious Use of the Means, yet their subtil and malicious Insinuations will be able to spoil all, enough to stagger the firmest Resolutions, and render all the Methods of divine Grace vain and ineffectual: No Council, nor Re- proof; no Instruction, nor Advice; nei- ther Sermons nor Sacraments, will be able to prevail against the Temptations of bad Men, or take Effect against the Force and Influence of a corrupt and vicious Example. For the Sons of *Be- lial* stand ready to undo all that ever hath been done by the Motion of God's Spirit within, or the Instruction of his

Word

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Word without us : It is their Business and Delight to corrupt and prejudice one another against the great and weighty Truths of Religion ; to suppress and stifle all hopeful Beginnings and Dispositions to Virtue in those they converse withal ; to laugh and jeer them out of the most serious Purposes and Resolutions ; and by wrong Names and reproachful Terms, to put People, if possible, out of conceit with their Duty : And, I suppose, I may have the Experience of some of my Readers to confirm the Truth of what I say.

LET a Man begin to take up, and grow serious, and they will presently conclude he is Melancholy and Morose ; if he scruples a Compliance with their Follies and Extravagancies, he is then Nice and Precise ; if he makes a more than ordinary Profession of Virtue and Godliness, and lives a devout, regular, and well-ordered Life, then presently he passes for a Fanatic, or some such Thing. Which last, let me tell you by the Way, is a mighty Reproach and Scandal to our Church ; as if they whom they call by that Name were the only

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Persons

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Persons in the World that have a Shew or Sense of Religion; or that none could be serious, but he must presently desert our Communion, and list himself into a contrary Party: When, God be praised, we have in our Church as many Helps and Encouragements to become religious and devout, as there are to be found any where else throughout the Christian World. And if any Cause hath been given for the forementioned Charge, it hath been occasioned through the lewd and offensive Behaviour of this Sort of Men we have been speaking of; who, tho' they are pleased to own themselves of our Communion, and shew themselves sometimes in our public Assemblies, yet are meer Strangers to all Religion, and know not what Reverence and Devotion means. Such Men can be no great Credit to any Church or Party they shall join themselves with; and therefore, to what Purpose should we be fond of them: Nay, if such rotten Members were cut off from the Body of the Church, I dare say she would be no loser by it; Religion, I am certain, would not; which
hath

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hath suffered so much already on their
Account.

BUT to proceed. — The Stiffness
and Regularity of a holy Life ought
not to be confined to a particular Party,
much less charged as a Reproach upon
any. For Holiness is the Doctrine and
Design of the Gospel, the chief End
and Aim of our Christian Profession,
which belongs in common to all that own
themselves Christians; and then, why
not to our Church and Communion
among the rest? Such Men, therefore,
may as well charge the very Profession
of Religion with being Fanatical and
Precise, as the Practice of it; and I am
sure no Man will adventure to do either,
but such as are Enemies to both, and
would gladly bring all Religion into
Contempt.

AND this, I fear, is at the Bottom
of such Mens Designs; who, having no
Religion of their own, have but little
Kindness for it in others; and therefore,
by calling Things by wrong Names,
and giving them reproachful Terms,
endeavour.

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endeavour to prejudice them against all that is good and serious.

WHEREFORE, in the Third Place,

Thirdly, WE ought to avoid the Company of bad Men, as the great Instruments and Agents which the Wicked One makes use of to ruin and destroy Souls.

THERE are a great many Tempters in the World, besides the Devil, and such are little less Enemies to the Souls of Men, than he is; who engage in the same Cause, and set on foot the same pernicious Designs against God and Religion that he doth. Were it not for them, the Devil could not make so many Profelytes; neither would he be capable of doing so much Mischief in the World, as commonly he doth: But it is the debauched and lewder Sort of Men, which espouse his Interest, and plead his Cause, and act his Part; and that much more effectually, than otherwise he himself would be able to do. For should that evil Spirit shew himself in his own Colours, or appear openly
in

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in a Temptation, he would be more likely to scare from it, than allure to it: but now wicked Men are cloathed in our Nature, and endued with like Passions and Affections with ourselves, we converse more freely and familiarly with them, and by this Means they are apt to surprize us unawares, and to get within us, when we least suspect them. Now surely, if the Tempter himself, were he visible upon Earth, ought to be dreaded and abhorred by us as the avowed Enemy of Mankind, as the Envier of their Happiness, and Promoter of their Ruin; then, for the same Reason, we ought to be no less afraid of his Factors and Instruments that are abroad in the World, and employed by him to carry on his Designs.

DO TH it not therefore concern us to oppose ourselves against all Designs and Attempts of this Nature, to avoid those Nets and Snares which are laid by the great Adversary of Souls, and to be as shy and cautious of his Agents and Emissaries, as we would be of the Tempter himself, should he come and

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set upon us in an open Manner, as once he did upon our blessed Saviour?

THEREFORE, when we observe how forward some Men are to entice others to Sin, and draw them into a Temptation, ought we not to be as earnest in calling them back, and forewarning them of the Danger, if possible, to rescue them out "out of the snare of the devil," and save those that are ready to perish? Shall bad Men make it their Business to endanger Souls, and bring them into the same Guilt and Condemnation with themselves; and shall we, who are entrusted with the Care of them, tamely look on, and hold our Peace, for fear of disobliging and giving Offence? Shall they take so much Pains, and use so many Arts to croud hell, and fill up the Place of Torments; and shall we be at none at all to prevent their Designs, and pull them as "fire-brands out of the fire?" *Jude 23.* Surely the Souls of Men are little beholden to us, if we have not as much Courage and Resolution in our Endeavours to save them, as wicked Men have in their Attempts to ruin them; especially considering they are our Flock, and

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and part of our Charge, committed to us by God, and for which we must be accountable another Day. Have we not therefore as much Reason to appear zealous in a good Cause, as any Man can have to grow bold and confident in a bad one? And if this be not enough to excuse our Zeal, and justify our most fervent Endeavours this Way, we will sit down contentedly under the worst of their Reproaches, and set as light by them, as they usually do by our Instruction and Reproof.

AND so much for the first General, namely, that if we would avoid the Danger of Ill Company, we must come among them as seldom as may be. But,

II. SECONDLY, Because I have shewed you before, we cannot always avoid the Conversation of ill Men, we must endeavour to arm and fortify ourselves against the Danger and Infection thereof, when at any Time they may lie in our Way, and we shall have Occasion, as sometimes we may, to converse with them.

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Now my Advice in this Case shall be this ; that when you find yourselves engaged in any Company, which you have reason to suspect as none of the best, be cautious of two Things :

1. *First*, Not to take their Counsel, or comply with their Examples, in any Thing that is ill.

2. *Secondly*, Think never the worse of Religion for their Scoffing, and making a Mock of it.

1st, If you cannot wholly avoid their Company ; yet be sure to stand upon your Guard, and take up a Resolution not to comply beyond the Bounds of Innocence and Decency. Stir not a Foot beyond what is lawful and expedient ; for if once you come to quit your Post, and pass your Bounds, you will not know where to stop, nor when to give over. For Company is acknowledged to be a very tempting and bewitching Thing ; it makes Men do many Things both against their Interest and Inclination, and which otherwise they

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they would not have done, but out of Compliance to their Company, and because they would not be thought unfociable.

THEREFORE abundance of Caution and Prudence is necessary to be used here; a great deal of Courage and Resolution to resist a Temptation, when once you are engaged among them. It is an easy Matter to swim down the Stream, or be carried away with a Crowd; but to bear up against the one or the other, *Hic labor, hoc opus*; this is the hardest and most difficult Task of all: And yet this is absolutely necessary for a Christian, who would keep close to his Duty, and lead his Life agreeable to the Principles and Obligations of his Profession. He will be sure to meet with many Temptations and Discouragements in the Pursuit and Progress of a virtuous Life, which he must beforehand arm himself against: He must resolve to bear up under all Opposition, with a Mind hardened against Reproach, and be prepared, with his Saviour, to suffer the Scorn and Contradiction of Sinners, rather than grow weary and faint in his Mind;

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Mind ; for he that doth so, is very unfit to engage in this Warfare.

SOMETIMES they will upbraid you with Singularity, and object Preciseness in the Case. This, I confess, in little and unnecessary Things, is an Argument of Folly and Affectation, but in point of Virtue and Religion, it is a Token of deep Thought and serious Reflection. Some People love to be singular in particular Modes and Fashions, which they envy to the Vulgar, and hate when they grow common ; why then should that be accounted a Fault in Religion, which they think to be none at all in Pride and Vanity ?

BUT if the Practice of Religion be singular, pray who are they that make it so ? or who are to be blamed for it ? Did all those who own themselves Christians, live up to what they have solemnly bound and engaged themselves by their baptismal Vow and Promise, the Practice of Christianity would be no longer singular, but as universal and extensive as the very Name and Profession of it : And so it was in the primitive

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mitive Times ; the Sight of a profligate and debauched Christian was as rare and singular then, as it is common and usual among us now. But Virtue and Goodness must be charged with Singularity, as long as the greatest Part of " the world lies in wickedness," 1 *John* v. 19. And if ever Singularity be justifiable and praiseworthy, it is in being singularly good and virtuous, in excelling the Generality of Mankind, in despising the World, the vain Customs and lewd Examples thereof, and in living " blameless and harmless," as the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and " perverse generation," *Phil.* ii. 15. And he that in this Case is ashamed or afraid to be thought singular, can never hope to make one of CHRIST's little Flock, but must expect his Fate among the common Herd.

PERHAPS, on the other hand, it may be judged Rudeness and Incivility, when in Company, not to do as they do, especially as to the Excesses of Meats and Drinks. But why so ? If there be any Rudeness in the Case, it lies on their Side, not on yours, in pressing you beyond

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beyond the Bounds of what is modest and decent, safe and convenient: And I know no Rudeness or Incivility comparable to that, which openly affronts God and his Laws on the one hand, and which besots and depraves human Nature on the other; the one makes us Beasts, and the other Devils, in the Figure of Men.

And thus it is no hard Matter to put by all the Scoffs and Reproaches of bad Men, and make them recoil on the first Aggressors themselves.

2dly, When you chance to happen into the Company of bad Men, never think the worse of Religion, nor be put out of conceit with your Duty, for any Thing they shall spitefully object or profanely alledge against it: But in the

1. *First Place*, take your Measures of Religion, not from the Opinions of Men, or the Example of the Multitude, but from the Records of holy Scripture, where alone it is to be found pure and incorrupt; free from all those gross Mixtures

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Mixtures and Alloys wherewith ill Men, for their own private Ends, have corrupted and debased it; where you will find Religion to be quite another Thing from that which is commonly talked of and practised in the World; that the Service it requires from us, is "a reasonable Service," such as becomes rational Creatures to pay their wise and great Creator; that its Commands are holy, just, and good, tending in their own Nature to the Happiness and Perfection of ours. In a word, that it is the eternal Truth and Wisdom of God; that never alters or changes with the "fashions of the world, which soon pass away," nor with the Fancies or Opinions of Men, which commonly wait upon their Interest, and are subservient to their Lusts and Passions.

THE Principles of Religion, as contained in the sacred Oracles, like God Himself, who is the Author of them, admit of no "variableness nor shadow of turning;" for what is once a Truth in Religion, always is, and will be so.

It

IT hath been an usual Practice, in all Ages, to set on foot and cry up those Doctrines and Opinions which suit most with Mens corrupt Appetites and Inclinations, with their secular Interest and Advantage; and on the other hand, to bring those into Contempt and Reproach with the People, which at any Time run cross and counter to their Designs, whereof the present Age is a deplorable Instance, in respect of those loose and pernicious Doctrines which are taken up and pleaded for by the Libertines of the Age, who are impatient of all Restraint, and would be under no Government, but that of their slavish Lusts and domineering Passions.

BUT this shifting of Principles, and "turning about with every wind of doctrine," is like to be not only a Scandal to, but the Ruin of all Religion; for if once we come to measure Good and Evil, to judge of Truth and Error, by Mens private Interest or enthusiastic Conceits on the one hand, or by the public Affronts and Reproaches which are cast upon them,

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them, on the other, we must immediately discard not only revealed, but natural Religion; and reduce the Principles of both into so small and narrow a Compass, as it will be a hard Matter at last to find out either what is Truth, or what is Religion. We must then not only part with our Bibles, but lay aside our Reason and Understanding too, and suffer ourselves to be put upon by every designing Person, or confident Imposer, who hath a Turn to serve, or a Lust to gratify. This, I say, would be the mischievous Consequence of judging of Truth, especially the great Truths of Religion, by the Opinions and Prejudices of Men, rather than by the known Rule and Standard of God's Word; a Rule so straight and perfect, as cannot warp, and will not be biased by any Interest or Advantage in the World.

AGAIN, on the other hand, do not think the better of Vice for the Multitudes of those that engage in it, nor conceive it one whit the more creditable for the Name or Lustre of a great Example, how eminent or conspicuous soever.

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ever. Vice is never the more to be embraced for the Number of its Flatterers and Admirers, nor Virtue to be despised and had in Contempt, on the Account of the Paucity or Meanness of those that stand up, and appear publicly in its Defence. For the most make the worst Choice, and go the wrong Way; the greatest Company, both for Number and Quality, it is to be feared, will be found travelling in the "broad road" that leads to Destruction; while the "strait path, and narrow way," is but little frequented, "and few there be that find it," saith our Saviour, *Matt. vii. 13, 14.*

2. *Secondly*, Consider, tho' Religion and Virtue may not always meet with that Esteem and Veneration which is due unto them, yet this is certain, they never yet were adjudged scandalous in the World, as Irreligion and Profaneness have always been; yea, those very Men who could never be reconciled to it in their own Persons, have revered and honoured it in the Persons of good Men; and they that think otherwise, have had

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had the Suffrages of the Generality of Mankind in all Ages to refute and contradict them.

ALAS! the Sensual and Vicious are not competent Judges in religious Matters: "the carnal man discerns not the things of the Spirit," saith the Apostle, because "they are spiritually discerned," and not to be judged of by the Rules and Maxims of "worldly Wisdom," sensual Interest, or carnal Policy. The Minds of Sinners are "darkened, through the blindness that is in them;" the Disorder of their Passions, and the Fumes of their Lusts and Intemperance, cast a Mist before their Eyes and cloud their Understandings, whereby they are unable to discern the great Truths of God, in their own proper and natural Light; in which respect, their Wisdom is by the Holy Ghost adjudged "foolishness," 1 Cor. iii. 9. and their Practice "madness," Eccles. ix. 3.

Now would any Man go to "a fool" to learn "what is wisdom, or to a mad-man what is sound judgment and understanding?" So in this Case, shall we go to the

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the wicked and debauched Part of Mankind to learn what is Religion, or to the worldly and sensual, to instruct us in the Things of the Spirit, or teach us "the deep Things of God?"

METHINKS it is a strange and wonderful Contradiction, to hear Christians set light by Christianity, and talk against it at that Rate, as many do; to hear them quarrel with, and reproach the Strictness of that Religion, which they themselves do own, as to the Nature and Profession of it at least, and would make us to believe, they hope one Day to be saved by. As if a Man was to be thought worse of, for being that in good earnest, which they themselves pretend to be in jest; or that Falshood and Treachery were to be adjudged no Crimes in Religion, which are yet universally condemned as base and villainous in all other Instances thereof. This is a Degree of Guilt peculiar to Christians. Men of no other Sect or Persuasion, that I know of, ever stood publicly charged with exposing their Religion and rallying the Doctrines and Principles

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ciples thereof, as the Professors of Christianity have frequently done.

“HARD therefore, hath been thy
“Entertainment, O blessed JESUS!
“which in every Age thou hast met
“withal, to be thus vilified and re-
“proached, affronted and dishonour-
“ed, not so much by thy avowed
“Enemies, as by thy false Friends,
“and treacherous Disciples! And no
“less hard hath been the Fate of thy
“most excellent Religion!” That an
Institution so divine in its Principles,
so noble in its Ends, and so excellent
in all its Parts; a Religion that is so
great a Friend to the Comfort of a
Man’s Life here, and his everlasting
Happiness hereafter, should yet be run
down by every bold and trifling Wit,
and treated after the most unworthy
and disingenuous Manner, by those very
Persons who have vowed and sworn
all Obedience thereunto; and to do
it, as some have done, with a Spite and
Malice infinitely beyond that of a Jew,
and exceeding the Barbarity of a very
Heathen!

A

A P I E C E of Guilt this is, which is too big for Expression, too black for Excuse, and no doubt will at last meet with a Punishment worthy of it. And therefore, of such Mens Company and Conversation you cannot be too shy, nor too cautious: "My soul, come not thou into their secrets: unto their assemblies be not thou united," *Gen. xlix. 6.*

It is every one's Interest then, who hath any Reverence for Religion, any Regard to, or Belief of a future State, to be aware of such Men and their Communications, as they would of Poison in their Meat and Drink; to take heed of being tainted by their ill Principles and corrupt Practices, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and endeavour to make others as bad as themselves, and by both to ruin and destroy Souls. And for this Reason, we cannot be too earnest and solicitous in pressing upon you the Advice of the wise Man, *Prov. i. 10.* "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not; walk
" not

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" not thou in the way with them ; refrain
" thy foot from their path : " for, *Chap.*
v. 4, 5. " Their end is bitter as worm-
" wood, as sharp as a two-edged sword :
" their feet go down to death, their steps
" take hold of hell-fire."

F I N I S.



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